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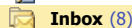
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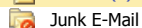
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Reminder: Adams Introduces Right to PROTEST Act

Alma Adams Press [sam.spencer@mail.house.gov]

Sent: Thursday, June 18, 2020 5:22 PM

To: [Steve Johnston](#)

Adams Introduces Right to PROTEST Act

WASHINGTON, DC - Today, Congresswoman Alma Adams (NC-12) introduced the **Right to Protect Real Objectors Taking Exception to Systemic Transgressions (PROTEST) Act**, to protect Americans exercising their right to protest from overly hostile conduct from law enforcement. Adams' bill would make the use of riot control agents, as defined by federal law, without a clear, audible warning given beforehand and a reasonable amount of time to disperse, a criminal violation subject to 18 U.S.C. § 242, "Deprivation of Rights Under Color of Law." **This common-sense proposal would set a federal standard regarding the use of chemical agents**, holding all police departments accountable for indiscriminate use against American citizens.

"Across our country, chemical agents are being used on protesters who are predominately peaceful. Entire groups of protesters are being made to choke on gas, as well as being subjected to pepper balls and pepper spray, for the actions of a few protesters," **said Congresswoman Adams.** "Over the past month, protesters were often the victims of indiscriminate force. On many occasions, they couldn't breathe."

"The **Right to PROTEST Act** makes such indiscriminate use of chemical agents a federal crime, holding all police departments nationwide accountable. We cannot lose the trust of the public by inflicting indiscriminate punishments without judge, jury, or trial," **concluded Adams.**

[The text of the bill is available here.](#)

A [video statement from Rep. Adams is available here](#) and [on Facebook](#).

Original cosponsors include **Homeland Security Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson, Small Business Committee Chairwoman Nydia Velázquez, Oversight and Reform Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney, Congresswoman Marcia Fudge, and Congressman Filemon Vela.**

"Troops are banned from deploying tear gas and chemical agents against enemies in war, and yet we are still using it here at home - that

is unacceptable. I am proud to join Rep. Adams on her bill to stop law enforcement from indiscriminately using these tactics on Americans demonstrating their First Amendment rights to peacefully protest,” **said Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney (NY-12).**

“New Yorkers and Americans in nearly every city are peacefully making their voices heard to support police reforms and call for the type of systemic changes we need to end police violence against Black people and people of color. When they march and exercise their first amendment rights, they shouldn’t fear exposure to tear gas, which can result in permanent or long lasting damage. I’m proud to join in supporting this measure to vastly limit the use of this dangerous weapon,” **said Congresswoman Nydia M. Velázquez (NY-07).**

Background (attributable to Sam Spencer, Deputy Chief of Staff and Communications Director for Rep. Adams):

Over the past two weeks, we’ve seen numerous examples of the conflict between free exercise of constitutional rights and the brute force of the state. Chemical agents, including tear gas and pepper balls, have been fired at peaceful protestors in major American cities, the most high-profile of these incidents involving the U.S. Park Police [using chemical agents](#) to disperse protesters in Washington, D.C. so that President Trump could walk across Lafayette Square to St. John’s Episcopal Church.

On the fifth night of recent protests in Charlotte, [CMPD officers trapped protesters](#) on all sides before using pepper spray and tear gas on the crowd. Rep. Adams [previously spoke out](#) about the use of force in this instance. Near-unanimous condemnation of the incident led to the City of Charlotte defunding chemical agents in the FY 2021 police budget last Monday.

We should be gravely concerned about the use of these “riot control agents” on our soil. While they are “non-lethal,” they do more than disperse crowds – they too often [punish and harm the innocent](#). Also, there is [growing concern](#) that tear gas exacerbates the spread of diseases including COVID-19. [NPR highlighted](#) both a 2014 study by the U.S. Army concluded that soldiers exposed to tear gas were more likely to contract respiratory illnesses; and a [recent letter](#) signed by over a thousand public health professionals also “Oppose[d] any use of tear gas, smoke, or other respiratory irritants” during the protests. With the use of such agents [banned as a method of warfare on the battlefield](#) of almost every country in the world, there is no reason why we should subject Americans peacefully exercising their right to assembly to these indecencies.

Congresswoman Alma Adams represents North Carolina’s 12th Congressional District (Charlotte) and serves as Vice Chair of the House Committee on Agriculture. Additionally, she serves on the House Financial Services Committee and the House Education & Labor Committee, where she serves as Chair of the Workforce Protections Subcommittee.

###

Sam Spencer

Deputy Chief of Staff | Communications Director

Congresswoman Alma S. Adams, NC-12

2436 Rayburn House Office Building Washington, DC 20515

Phone: 202-225-1510 Fax: 202-225-1512

Connect with us



Office of Congresswoman Alma Adams | 801 E. Morehead St, Suite 150, Charlotte, NC 28202
Phone: 704-344-9950

[Unsubscribe sjohnston@tuesdayforumcharlotte.org](mailto:sjohnston@tuesdayforumcharlotte.org)

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